



## **Recommendation 92-4**

### **Coordination of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Service Programs**

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(Adopted June 19, 1992)

Since the 1960s, the federal government has established numerous service programs to help meet the needs of migrant farm workers. From the early days, migrants have been considered a uniquely federal responsibility, primarily because of their interstate movement, which makes it hard for the workers and their families to qualify for local assistance and disrupts other services like schooling for the children. As these programs have evolved, many have come to serve non-migrant seasonal farm workers as well.

The programs to meet health, education, housing, job training, and other needs of migrant and seasonal farm workers (MSFWs) have developed separately. There are approximately 10 MSFW-specific service programs, and farm workers also draw upon the assistance of numerous other general programs such as food stamps or Medicaid. The four largest federal programs are Migrant Education, administered by the Department of Education; Migrant Health and Migrant Head Start, both administered by the Department of Health and Human Services; and the Department of Labor's special job training programs for MSFWs under section 402 of the Job Training Partnership Act.

Each program has its own definition of migrant and/or seasonal farm worker, as well as other eligibility standards. The result is a potential for overlap of some services and gaps in others, and there is no overarching provision for effective coordination among the programs. Various efforts have been undertaken at the national level to improve coordination, but with mixed success to date. These include an Interagency Committee on Migrants, a staff-level group that meets quarterly, largely for information-sharing purposes; an Interagency Coordinating Council, established informally as a forum for policy-level decision makers involved in the various programs, but now inactive; and a Migrant Inter-Association Coordinating Committee, involving nonprofit grantees and other organizations representing direct service providers.

In addition, MSFWs often qualify for other services provided by state and local governments or funded through private initiative, each governed by its own particular definitions or eligibility standards. These services are especially important in areas where some or all of the major federal programs are not present. Effective local service providers therefore have to be adroit in locating those available services, from whatever source, that can best meet the needs of



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their clientele. Because of the great variety in locally available services of this kind, much of the task of coordination among MSFW service programs necessarily takes place at the local and state level. Many states are finding ways to encourage this process by the creation of a governor's committee or task force, involving service providers, growers, representative government officials, farm workers, and others.

The federal government should also take steps to improve coordination of services. For example, the intake procedures for each service program (now typically undertaken separately by each of the agencies, despite considerable duplication) should be streamlined. To effectuate such efforts, and to provide better interagency consultations before program changes are introduced, the President should establish by executive order a policy-level Interagency Coordinating Council on MSFW programs. This Council is not intended to replace, and indeed should promote, existing coordination at the program staff, state, and service delivery level.

To facilitate interagency coordination, whether or not such a Council is created, a reliable system for gathering data on the nation's population of MSFWs is needed. Although each agency has its own mechanism for generating program statistics and estimates of the target population, these vary widely in method and scope, and each suffers from specific inadequacies. They produce widely varying pictures of the nation's population of MSFWs, to the continuing frustration of legislators, service providers, researchers, and others. Agricultural labor data have always been left out of the Department of Labor's regular employment data system, and no other adequate permanent data source now fills the gap. The recommendation provides some guidance on the goals of such an information-gathering effort.

### **Recommendation**

#### **I. Coordination at the National Level**

An Interagency Coordinating Council on migrant and seasonal farm worker (MSFW) programs should be established to strengthen national coordination of MSFW service programs. The Council would be charged, *inter alia*, with identifying specific coordination tasks to be accomplished, in most cases under the primary responsibility of a designated lead agency.

A. To ensure an enduring structure and a clear mandate, the President should issue an executive order creating the Council, specifying the policy-level officials from appropriate



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agencies who would be permanent members and designating a chair. The order should also designate an agency that would initially have primary responsibility for staffing the Council's meetings and other functions. The Council should be specifically charged to coordinate and review MSFW service programs, giving particular attention to gaps in services and unjustified overlap. It should encourage public participation through public meetings, creation of an advisory committee, or other means.

B. The executive order should provide the Council, in cooperation with the Office of Management and Budget, review proposals for significant changes in any agency's service program (including proposed legislation, regulations, and grantee performance standards). OMB should consolidate or coordinate its own oversight of all federal MSFW service programs.

C. The executive order should assign to the Council the initial responsibility to develop, through delegations to the appropriate agencies, a reliable and comprehensive MSFW population census system, independent of any of the specific programs, along the lines described in part II. Other specific coordination tasks the Council might wish to take up include development of consolidated or streamlined intake processing for MSFW programs, provision of better linkages among existing MSFW information clearinghouses, and encouragement of cooperation among direct service providers.

D. The Council should identify and assign priorities to the coordination tasks to be accomplished, with a strategy and timetable for their achievement. In most instances, it should assign lead responsibility for each specific coordination task to a designated agency. That agency's coordination efforts with other agencies may include suggesting regulations or other implementation measures.

E. The Council should study the differing eligibility standards of MSFW programs and identify, if appropriate, where consistency could be achieved without substantial impact on the beneficiaries of those programs.

F. The Council should also study and make recommendations on the strengthening of state and local coordination of MSFW programs.

### **II. Information Gathering on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers**

A. To improve coordination of and service delivery in MSFW programs, the executive order should:



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(1) Authorize the Council to develop an integrated, cost-effective system for gathering data on the number, characteristics, and distribution of MSFWs and their dependents;

(2) Authorize the Council to designate an appropriate agency to have responsibility for collecting the data, with the cooperation of federal agencies with MSFW service programs;

(3) Direct appropriate federal agencies with expertise in gathering these kinds of data, such as the Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, or the National Agricultural Statistics Service, to cooperate with the Council's effort; and

(4) Provide opportunities for submission of data and information from the public.

B. This data system should ensure the information gathered on MSFWs and their dependents sufficiently describes workers employed in a broad spectrum of U.S. agriculture and related industry. This means the data should include and distinguish among workers employed, for example, in crop and livestock production, the packing and processing of farm products, and fisheries. Data should be collected on workers and their dependents, including such factors as recency and frequency of migration, farm and nonfarm earnings and periods of employment, and health, education, and housing characteristics. These comprehensive data should be collected in a form designed to be useful to service programs with differing definitions of eligible workers and their dependents.

C. This data system should be designed to help the Council identify general trends—including changes in the total number of MSFWs and their dependents and employment—patterns and opportunities for coordination among MSFW programs. To help achieve this goal, the Council should consider whether there are areas in which a consensus on a set of common characteristics of MSFWs should be developed for statistical purposes.

### **Citations:**

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